SYMPOSIUM:

THE URBAN COMMUNITY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

OPENING ADDRESS*

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The word "ecology" first appeared in the English language in 1873, and since then we have seen the industrial revolution, the population explosion, planless urbanisation and the colossal growth of sewage and garbage. In recent years there have been many calls for action to curb unplanned expansion, but many of the proposals have been negative — "Ban the bomb", "No bill-boards", "Save this lake or harbour". These are only aspects of one larger problem for which we have not yet found a really practical solution.

The first positive step must be to clarify our thinking. That is the main object of this symposium.

No matter what any of us may think of it in theory, most people live in towns or cities. This is often from necessity but also, very often, from choice. The average New Zealander's view of the countryside is, to use an old quotation, that it's "a nice place to visit but you wouldn't want to *live* there".

So we are left with the conflicting demand that most people want the countryside left unspoiled for their enjoyment, but they don't want to live there and help care for it. They want the land to be productive but unchanged; and they insist that primary and secondary industry should provide them with jobs and a good standard of living without disturbing the scenery. This being impossible, is difficult to arrange. It is the task of planners to do what they can.

There is another factor that is steadily gaining acceptance. That is, if we do not maintain and improve the quality of our environment by wise and careful management and planning, all other factors fall into the discards; because we are increasingly realising that our environment is our life. Without fertile soil, clean air and pure water, man cannot live. All planning must be weighed against this basic need.

On one hand we need to produce to live, and our land is our main production asset. On the other it is not inexhaustible — as older countries have painfully discovered — and conservation needs just as much management as production. Add to this the facts that specialised groups naturally tend to take a narrow view of their own needs, and in many cases do not explain their reasons to the satisfaction of laymen, and that not all people are yet convinced to an equal degree of the need for conservation planning. The difficulties multiply for those of us who have to make the decisions.

I think it must be accepted that contemporary society depends on man's ability to work fundamental changes in the natural environment. Indeed, this society could not have developed without some large-scale clearing of bushland and ploughing of ungrassed areas, without substantial changes in natural drainage systems and without the conversion of some rural landscapes into the compact urban places essential for many industrial and commercial processes. It is the extent to, and the manner in which we make these changes, the demands of a fast-developing technology and that most inevitable of all forms of pollution — overpopulation — that are making our surroundings increasingly crowded, noisy and soiled.

While not all these problems are serious in New Zealand yet, there is enough warning for complacency to be inexcusable. With more than 66 million acres and a population of less than three million, New Zealand seemingly has enough land to satisfy most of the economic and social wants of the community. An average of one person

* Slightly abridged transcript.

to every 22 acres is a fairly low occupancy rate — even allowing room for the 22 sheep with which we share this area. Unlike more closely settled countries, we have not yet felt the full impact of any serious conflict in claims on natural resources; but recently there have been confrontations on a number of matters, and as Minister of Lands and Forests I have become involved in judging and unravelling some of these conflicts. Perhaps the most serious recent one has been over the raising of Lake Manapouri and this, of course, is at present being examined by a Commission of Inquiry.

There are frequent conflicts of interests in land use between one form of economic activity and another. Is forestry or farming the most suitable use for a given area of land? Should we use our available money to buy more land for reserves while it is available, or spend the money developing what we have? No blanket answer can be given to these and many similar questions. Each must be decided on the basis of knowledge which is continually up-dated, and each is an individual case.

The present keen demand for minerals has brought another conflict. Those familiar with Central Otago will know of the vast areas of tailings that have been left by the gold dredges. This land will be useless for many years — possibly forever, as far as we are concerned — and we must weigh the relative merits of getting a single mineral return from the land against the continued cropping of forestry, agriculture or horticulture. While we will always require minerals, I doubt if we can continue to give a blank cheque to those engaged in extracting them, to do as they wish with the land. On the recommendation of the National Parks Authority and the Lands and Survey Department, I have set quite stringent conditions before allowing prospecting or mining in national parks or reserves — if, in fact, it is allowed at all.

There are also conflicts between differing social needs, and these are no less hard fought because they may have no economic incentives. There are people who would like to see national parks and areas of scenic and scientific interest locked away from the public — "museum" conservation. Others want to see areas — often the same areas — opened for public use and enjoyment, even if it means building cableways up the sides of mountains and providing all the comforts of home.

Then there is the conflict between Maori and Pakeha ideas on how natural resources should be used. With shellfish, for instance, old ideas of conservation, once rigorously practised by the Maori, are often not sufficient to protect them against modern economic demands. To the Maori, sea food is not a luxury, or just something to be exploited for a profit. It is a necessary part of his life, and at times of important meetings, or at funerals, the provision of various kinds of seafoods is vital to his organisation, pride and wellbeing. Therefore, in planning the conservation and distribution of what the sea provides, the special Maori traditional rights and social needs must be taken into account.

Then, again, where do Maori rights end and Pakeha rights begin? We cannot entirely bar some types of commercial fishing because one section of the community may not agree with it. Again, there is no single, easy answer.

This is a symposium on the urban community and natural resources, and it is the urbanisation of land that is starting to produce a growing urban/rural conflict. At present, of our 66.4 million acres we are using 0.4 million in urban areas. Between 1949 and 1964 approximately 39,000 acres of farming land were converted to urban use. Planned expansion from 1964 to 1984 suggests we will need another 78,500 acres. In relation to the amount of good farming land we have — about 18 million acres — the overall rate of conversion up to 1984 is not startling; but the expansion is mainly concentrated in certain districts and, in those areas, it can have serious effects.

The question arises, as we go into the next decade, whether we can afford to continue supporting New Zealand's traditional "cult of the quarter-acre", or whether we must try to formulate some policy of containment for our cities that makes more use of high-rise housing and planned communities.

New Zealand is an island country, and there are few centres of population without reasonable access to either seashores or large internal bodies of water; but will this always be true? Many coastal areas which should remain available to the public are being developed for private subdivision. Owners and sub-dividers are usually prepared to make only a minimum of reserves available, and smaller local bodies find it hard to raise enough money to acquire adequate reserve areas. In the quest for funds to provide essential services,

local authorities are susceptible to pressures to subdivide shoreline and other desirable reserve areas, and there is often a similar problem further inland.

This is compounded by the population drift to the north; and it is in the north, where most of the people are, that there is a tremendous growth in water-based recreation and a tremendous demand for coastal areas for public use. Many of the local planning authorities in this area are too small to make large-scale purchases, particularly when the demand for these often comes from beyond the boundaries of these authorities' districts. If a popular beach is administered by a small local authority and used by many thousands of visitors, it is unrealistic to expect local ratepayers to subsidise their enjoyment.

However, not all aspects are depressing. Although in our rush to develop a viable society we had to give emphasis to agriculture and other primary production, we have not, from our earliest days, entirely overlooked the future. Undoubtedly, in the past, we felled forest and developed land that would have been better left alone, and allowed towns and villages to grow without the orderliness and safeguards of town-planning. At the same time, we managed to ensure that the nation retained ownership of the greater part of the land and specifically set aside more than 16 million acres of Crown Land in National Parks, State Forests and scenic and historic reserves and domains to give New Zealand one of the largest proportions of such land in the world. If those who come after us can maintain this attitude, our country will be adequately provided with publicly owned lands for recreation.

In attempting to do just that I have had to consider decisions that will be reflected in the nature of our country for a century ahead. Consider, for example, the following broad classes of problems:

> How much more land should be set aside and developed for agriculture and forestry — considering possible future as well as present needs and markets?
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> To what extent should additional areas be set aside to preserve the native biota?
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> To what extent should the Crown reserve further areas for recreation?
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> What greater use can we get by superimposing one use on another — by extending the principle of multiple use?

The over-riding consideration in all such problems is the maintenance of the standard of living of our now predominantly urban population. A factor of this is the requirement to increase overseas trade to maintain the standard. The Government's concern about developments affecting the important British market has frequently been demonstrated during the past few years. The fall in wool prices has also been disturbing. These are a few of the factors that affect the allocation of land to a particular use or, conversely, weigh against such exclusiveness.

My colleagues, particularly the Minister of Finance, insist that what finance we have available for development shall be used wisely in a manner that gives an adequate return on the capital invested. Both in agricultural and forestry development, this means using loan finance in a manner which will return the Crown seven per cent interest on its investment. When areas of reserves are excluded from land development or forest establishment projects, the remaining areas have to carry the capital costs of the reserves. Of course, accounting adjustments are possible, but the availability of non-interest-bearing appropriations is limited. Those interested in wetlands, conservation reserves and so on, find this attitude hard to understand and, as usual, many of the decisions are compromises.

Over the past two years, a great deal of finance has been needed to pay for certain scientific reserves established on the recommendation of your society and others. For example, more than $400 an acre had to be paid for a remnant of podocarp forest in the Manawatu. Elsewhere, the Crown paid a very considerable sum for the Cape Turakirae raised-beach reserves. Without very generous co-operation from the previous owner, I doubt whether the Crown would have been prepared to pay the then price of what is now a most valuable reserve. In another context, the Crown was asked to compete with American buyers for some foreshore areas in Abel Tasman National Park. We resisted paying the rather extravagant price asked and later were able, fortunately, to buy the coastal area at a more reasonable figure. This situation has been corrected by passing restricting legislation.

There is controversy over conversion of cut-over indigenous forests — particularly of podocarp/tawa associations — in the North Island, and possible utilisation of South Island beech forests for timber and hardwood chips for papermaking.

Investigations are being made to evaluate this second proposal, but I have already been informed that less than five per cent of the indigenous forest resources of the South Island is being considered in the investigations.

Even the setting aside of a Forest Sanctuary may not be as simple as many imagine. For instance, I have given approval for about 2,000 acres of Rotoehu Forest, where Wildlife officers recently found about 30 kokako on one ridge system, to be set aside as a Forest Sanctuary. We now face a dilemma, since the wildlife people are adamant that the proper procedure is to manipulate the forest to find out if the habitat requirements of kokako can be enhanced under management. This seems a very worthy approach to wildlife and forest management, but it does somewhat strain the sanctuary provisions of the Forest Act.

I have mentioned conflicts in the use of land resources, but these are not always clear-cut or single issues. Clearly, one of the most basic needs in the physical use of land is for soil and water conservation. We know that depletion of vegetative cover, erosion, flooding and pollution, damage our land and can affect it far from the source of the actual trouble. While areas must therefore be retained for these primary conservation measures, there are often other uses to which the land can be put — such as limited grazing, cropping and recreation. The increasingly used practice of multiple use of land solves some of these problems. Various combinations of forestry, agriculture, tourism, recreation and grazing, mean that many areas can provide us with concurrent or consecutive uses which, in effect, considerably expand the value of these areas.

It is realistic to say it will probably never be possible to avoid making some decisions on the use of natural resources which are essentially compromises, or which must necessarily prefer one use to another. So it is relevant to comment on what the Government is doing in its administration of natural resources to meet the administrative and environmental conflicts that face us. The National Development Conference in 1969 and, more recently, the Physical Environment Conference, gave this a lot of consideration; and one proposal that emerged was that a Land Use Advisory Commission should be set up to develop criteria and a national policy for land use. The Commission's terms of reference apply to Crown land and, on a consultative and indicative basis, to all other rural land. Such a commission can be expected to lay down useful guidelines and to provide the drive and co-ordination necessary for effective and rational use of natural resources in the future.

All this use, however, must be preceded by planning, and planning must follow knowledge. Our first step — which we are taking as fast as possible — is to gain comprehensive knowledge of all our land through land-use surveys. From these, and only from these, can come informed planning and management.

The Department of Lands and Survey, helped by other Government departments, is carrying out a complete inventory of all New Zealand land. Maps and reports are being prepared for each county, giving details of soils, geology, topography, tenure, history and many other aspects dealing with present and potential use of land. This will be used to identify and assess the suitability of land for future development. There are also a number of *ad hoc* surveys, one being a review of coastal areas to assess potential use and demand for public recreation.

A similar .eview of scenic and allied reserves throughout the country will be completed by the department this year.

All this is no more than a brief summary of the problems and challenges we face. My views on how we should reconcile the conflicting demands on natural resources may be summed up even more briefly.

We have come through an era when we have traditionally committed land to a single use, when we have allowed people to attack the land without repairing it afterwards, and when we have carelessly modified our environment with insufficient knowledge of what the consequences would be. This must change. Multiple land use, greater research into problems associated with environmental decay, and an active policy of planning and working to conserve our natural resources, are vital.